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SUBJECT: NINEWA: PRT BRANCH OFFICE HOSTS ECONOMIC FORUM IN SOUTH

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Team Leader Jason Hyland for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), Southern Branch Office, message.

Summary

11. (C) PRT Ninewa's Branch Office in Qayyara, covering southern Ninewa, expanded in January from the one liaison officer who staffed it since mid-2007 to a three-man team of civilian surge and military personnel. The office received superb support from local Coalition Forces to host on January 16 the first of its kind southern Ninewa economic forum among government and business leaders at the provincial and district levels. Building on the PRT's series of preparatory meetings with local leaders over the last month, the forum's participants explored ways to improve electricity generation and distribution, hire more teachers, reopen factories, and provide greater supplies of kerosene and benzene. The meeting concluded with a commitment to follow-up with the crucial electricity and fuel issues at the provincial level.

12. (C) Provincial Governor Duraid Kashmoula, Provincial Council Chair Hisham al Hamdani, Municipal Reconstruction Committee head Ismael Faris and Director General of Education Aliya Hassan Ismael represented the provincial government at the January 16 meeting in Qayyara, an economically important sub-district town in southern Ninewa. The local contingent included the mayors of Qayyara and Al Shoura, managers of the electricity and refining industries, local investors, and heads of municipal offices.

Energy Generation and Distribution Top Concern

13. (C) The mayors and factory managers complained about the lack of reliable electricity to southern Ninewa, which they said receives only a few hours per town on some days. The manager of the Al Shemal Power Plant, an incomplete generator project begun in Al Shoura more than two decades ago, said that his plant could produce 1,400 megawatts of power if he had more support from the Ministry of Electricity for equipment installation, training and maintenance. This additional electricity would help bypass what the southern Ninewans see as electricity distribution choke points outside the province, according to the Al Shoura mayor. In addition, the additional electricity could help boost operations and output at the Qayyara refinery, according to that plant's manager.

Possible Increase in Teaching Jobs in 2008

¶4. (C) The Director General of Education said local leaders' complaints of insufficient teacher hiring in southern Ninewa mirror the situation across the province. Overall, she said only 2,300 teacher positions have been filled province-wide, out of a total of 7,000. She predicted that southern Ninewa would receive more teachers in 2008, possibly pulling from the provincial pool of university-trained lecturers.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) The southern Ninewa leaders' ability to identify, prioritize and advocate for their concerns with provincial leaders displayed an increasingly sophisticated ability to work within designated provincial governance structures to achieve their political and resource goals. Specifically, the Qayyara mayor and managers of the electricity and refining plants used the January 16 meeting as a springboard to direct meetings they have scheduled with provincial leaders in the coming weeks. Although the January 16 forum resulted in no concrete commitments, it represented a step in the direction of local decision-making. For the Al Shoura mayor, that in itself was enough to describe the meeting as "better than excellent."

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